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AUTHOR'S NOTE HERE

[Chris, Do you want to include a performance note that addresses the physical capabilities of the actor, something which suggests that Achille being carried by the Attendant makes allowance for a particular degree of incapacity, but can be staged in other ways if the actor is more mobile? Or is that not what you intend?]

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THE BLASPHEMING MOON

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

CHRISTOPHER HEWITT

DRAMATURGY BY

MICHAEL ANTHONY THOMAS

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INTRODUCTION

My journey with this book began six years ago. Spinal surgery gone awry short-circuited my body permanently. In my initial frenzy and shock, I had no frame of reference. Remarking to my doctor how sorry I felt for Christopher Reeve because he was paralyzed, she looked surprised and asked, "What do you think you are?"

In rehab, I worked alongside other patients dealing with strokes or brain and spinal injuries. I resisted being in a group situation—not wanting to identify with others, felling safer in my own isolation. Seeing people worse off made me feel less sorry for myself— that is, until someone more flexible and mobile showed up.

In-house psychologists and social workers tried their best to be empathetic and supportive, although none could explain sexual functioning after spinal injury through a queer lens. Not one of them understood that this should be part of their job description, regardless of their own sexual orientation.

Out of the hospital, I was greeted with alarmed expressions and open-mouthed pity and treated as totally helpless. More than once my husband was asked how I was feeling as he pushed me along in a wheelchair. I ignored sympathetic smiles from the more fully abled and sought out eye contact with members of my new tribe. I longed to meet other gay men who were disabled.

I found comfort reading Lorenzo W. Milam's "Cripple Liberation Front Marching Band Blues," Kenny Fries' "Staring Back," Reynolds Price's "A Whole New Life," and Raymond Luczak's "Eyes of Desire." While I did not know other queer crips, at least I was not alone. Eventually I began to meet and network with other like-bodied men.

The action takes place between the years 1868 and 1898, in Aix-en-Provence and Paris. As the audience enters, the stage is dimly lit. On stage is a large table covered with plain cloth. On the table are various props. Along the back wall are three chairs: a bentwood cafe chair; a wicker chair with a bamboo cane hung over one arm; and a nondescript chair in need of repair. Also upstage are a rickety little table and an armoire. Downstage, slightly to one side, are a tall velveteen-covered chair and a small nightstand. On the nightstand are a palette, some brushes, and a rag. Projected on the rear wall is Cézanne's *Portrait of Achille Emperaire.*

SCENE ONE: AIX-EN-PROVENCE

(STAGE LIGHTS UP AS ACHILLE ENTERS, CARRIED TO VELVETEEN CHAIR BY ATTENDANT.)

My God! Middle age! I finally admit it.

(ACHILLE IS IN THE CHAIR. ATTENDANT EXITS.)

There's the good side:
you get a sense of direction,
you finally know who you are,
and anyone who doesn't like it
can get stuffed!
Then there's the bad side:
your hair starts falling out,
your teeth start falling out
and you can't get it up any more
and you wonder if you're ever going
to make it. I met this fellow
Paul Cézanne—he'll make it.
I put my money on him.
He wants to paint my portrait.
"Who'd want to look
at a dwarf?" I said.
"Wait till I've finished with you,"
he said, "Then they'll look!"

(PROJECTION OF PORTRAIT IS TURNED OFF AS ACHILLE ASSUMES THE POSE.)

I'm posing
for the fifth day in a row for Paul Cézanne.
He has me wearing my long johns
and my old blue dressing gown.
"I look as though I'm sitting
on a commode," I say.

pause, stimulates in unexpected ways, and manages to put men with different bodies, clothed or unclothed, on an equal footing with the stereotypical "normals."

"Exactly," he replies. "It's the new
Realism. Zola will love it!"
"But if it's the new Realism," I say,
"why is the portrait six foot high?
That's almost twice my size."
"Well," he says, "that's how I see you.
To me you're six foot tall."

Marie is darning.
She's a good housekeeper.
The needle goes in.
A good nurse.
The needle comes out.
She's kind.
The needle goes in.
Good with children.
Comes out.
I married her because of these things.
She and the children live in a world
of braids and button hooks,
rag dolls and doilies,
porridge and jam, white sheets and darning.

Marie does comfort me.
It's not the comfort of a lover
or a whore but of a mother
or a nurse. Yet sometimes
I come inside her
till she squeaks!
I do it as a gesture,
not thinking of her.
Sometimes I say out
loud as I take her,
"I'll show them!
I'll show them I can fuck!"

(TAKING OFF DRESSING GOWN.)

I'm looking out at the Mountain.
It is a pretty view
and I love to paint it
but I'm not so obsessed with it as Paul.
I long to climb to the top
but with my little legs I'd never make it.
Last night I dreamed I had struggled to the peak
with Paul's help,
and I held his hand

The fact that many disabled men have exposed themselves to George's camera may be a tribute to their courage. But the fact that George Dureau has photographed them in a way that makes his belief in their beauty unmistakable challenges us to think hard about the kinds of beauty we are used to extolling.

George and I talked for hours and he showed me photographs that had not made it into his book. There was a little man from Atlanta, a very hot-looking lawyer, whose friends insisted he pose for George. And so he did. I had seen him once during a visit to Atlanta and was impressed by his handsomeness. There were photos of another little man with patrician looks and seemingly mismatched limbs. A bare-chested man with a prosthetic-arm hook draped across his chest was someone I had seen coming out of a gay bar in Chicago.

Sadly, George's books are hard to come by these days. A trip to a local gay bookstore will net dozens of albums of well-muscled men in exotic surroundings, often engaged in equally exotic acts. Few of those models reflect the people who buy the books and even fewer offer bodies that challenge our perceptions about what is perfect and what is desirable.

I don't know if George Dureau's mission to photograph those other bodies grows out of his own sexuality or the need to shock. Most likely his motives combine the two. I met George only once. Since then I have seen one or two of his photographs on Web sites that featured pictures of disabled men. Some people protested that such photos objectified men with disabilities in a negative way. Most sites have stopped using them, mostly because of copyright issues. To me, it seemed incredibly positive that for a short while pictures of disabled men were given equal play on the Internet alongside pictures of hunks and bodybuilders.

Perhaps if more of George's photos had made it onto Web sites, disabled men themselves would have been able to view the images in a new way, as something that gives

and we took off and flew over the valley,
laughing and drunk like two mad angels:
mad angels of art.
We flew over the Art School
and thumbed our noses, over our houses
and waved and said:
"We can do without you all for a while."
Soon we were in Paris
circling over the towers of Notre Dame

and I said, "This will go on forever."
But Paul said, "No. This is a
dream about megalomania.
We think we're gods.
Icarus was like us.
Your wings will melt before mine, Achille.
I'm sorry, cher ami,
but they will."

(ACHILLE IS PANTING, OUT OF BREATH, YET EXUBERANT FROM EXERCISE.)

I am exhausted.
I've been hanging by my arms
from my trapeze for
for over half an hour.
I really believe it's working.
I've just measured myself by the doorframe—
definitely a quarter of an inch this month.
I've carved a notch.
Of course sometimes I think I am deluding myself—
I may be subconsciously pushing up on my heels.
But it looks as though I've grown
two inches in three years! Quite extraordinary at my age—
I'm thirty-five today.

(HE COLLAPSES BACK IN CHAIR; HE FONDLES THE NAP OF THE UPHOLSTERY.)

I adore velveteen-covered chairs!
I sit on them whenever I can—
in second-hand shops,
friends' houses.
I stroke the dark red
cropped grass of them and
I feel safe.
Perhaps being in the womb
was like being in a

He told me of searching for models in hospital wards, on Bourbon Street, and in parts of the city that most tourists never see. I've seen some of those areas and I understand their sadness: They will always yield men with disabilities by reason of the poverty and neglect found there.

It was hard not to be impressed by the beauty of George's photos and the desirability of his subjects. One of the amputees George photographed had been his lover. Another man, also a former lover, was someone I encountered years after my meeting with George. Yet another is a famous little man who can be seen frequently at Mardi Gras time in full leather, accompanied by his multiply-pierced lover.

Beautiful as they were, the photographs only hinted at the sexual power of the men they depicted, something I learned years later, after making love to several of the same men. Unlike the photographs of Diane Arbus, which emphasize the grotesque qualities of her subjects and their uneasy relationship to society, George Dureau's photographs suggest nobility.

In one, an African-American man uses a stick to maintain his balance while crossing his stump over his undamaged leg. The viewer is forced to acknowledge the discrepancy between the two limbs, but that discrepancy is merely part of a portrait that includes a wild mane of hair, the fineness of the subject's torso and the impressiveness of his exposed sex. The viewer is forced to look at the obvious plusses and what some would call minuses and come away weighing both as reasons for either rejecting or embracing the image.

The same holds true for George's image of Wally Sherwood. Wally is a man with a strong, beautiful face; his arms and legs defy ordinary proportions and thus say "dwarf." But if you equate "dwarf" with "undesirable," that beautiful face (and a well-packed jockstrap) may convince you to reevaluate your preconceptions. Wally is a sexual being, one not above standing naked on a bar as one man after another confirms just how desirable he can be.

red velveteen cocoon:
safe and sound,
unhurt when I kicked against the sides,
unseen, not a cripple yet,
only a promise,
a hope,
striving for the light
of 1829.
It wasn't a difficult birth.
I looked normal,
so they did the normal thing:
they turned me upside down
and slapped me.
It wasn't until I had cried non-stop
for three weeks that they discovered — Before X-rays how could they know?
they had cracked both my arms
and both my legs.
They called them green stick fractures–
like the snapping of green bamboo
or a stick of celery.
I can't eat celery
without shuddering;
and I worry for bamboo
bending fit to snap
in the wet southern winds,
the lashing of the unhelpful rain
that keeps me indoors.
I can't risk stepping on the pavement
in rain. I could slip and crack a thigh.
Rain is as dangerous to me
as the doctor's hand
wet and fresh from my mother's vagina.
Red velveteen is dry
and firm. I'm wrong.
The womb is wet and shifting.
That's why I was safe there.
I get confused sometimes
as to what is safe,
what is kind to my eggshell body.
I'd be best off
swimming in a placid pool,
the soft shore
whispering from all sides:
"Listen to your mother, Achille.
You're still mine
and you are a loving child."

I had expected that I might be met by one of George's models, but the man who ushered me inside, George's strikingly handsome assistant, had no observable disability. As I walked upstairs I noticed some works-in-progress on the walls, stylized portraits of dwarfs that would later be the basis of a book of George's paintings. The rooms had an open feel, obviously arranged to accommodate his work. When I reached the second floor I recognized George immediately from the photo of him and his frequent subject B.J. that had illustrated "Different Bodies."

George is African American and his tastes run towards other African-American men, especially those with disabilities. The majority of men he photographed for his first book are locals, many from the poor neighborhoods circling the Crescent City. Other subjects included a number of dwarf wrestlers and a few men from other cities. Our conversation touched on the lives of his models, including the legless B.J., whose arms-akimbo pose in "Drummer" had sparked questions about his body. There were those who wondered if he possessed sex organs or normal bowel functions. George showed me a photo of B.J. with an American flag draped tightly across his loins. The photo left no question about B.J's sex organs.

B.J., George explained, had been born with flippers emerging from drastically shortened calves. For "aesthetic" reasons, the flippers had been surgically removed, leaving extensive scarring. B.J. used a skateboard for mobility. It did not seem that George and B.J. had been involved in any way other than model-artist. It did not even seem that B.J. was gay or bisexual.

The photographs of B.J. were representative of George's work, ragged-edged black-and-white portraits with a lack of background detail that forces the viewer to focus attention on the subject, often portrayed naked. George presents disability without visual comment or apology. Only one other time would I see such powerful depictions of disabled men, at a Seattle exhibit that featured medical photographs of Civil War veterans taken to document the effects of war.

My father was an inspector of weights and measures.
Perhaps that is why I was born so small.
He was stingy when it came to weight.
Then my children all outgrew me
by the age of nine.
It was like fathering your own parents.
At first they were quite parental.
They liked to fetch and carry for me,
but once they reached the age of twelve
the novelty wore off.
Sometimes everything takes so much effort,
and yet I weigh so little
I have less to carry around.
Then again I have a curved spine
and a limp.
I am like a maimed elf,
a hindered sprite,
a spirit
held down by something other than weight,
by imbalance,
distorted contours,
angles.
I weigh my left side with my right,
my painting with my housekeeping,
my Paris with my Aix-en-Provence.
I stand swaying,
holding onto the doorframe,
one foot barely touching the ground.

(FADE TO BLACK.)

(ATTENDANT ENTERS, CROSSES TO TABLE AND SQUEEZES EXCESS WATER FROM CLOTH, HANDS CLOTH TO ACHILLE, AND EXITS. ACHILLE PLACES DAMP CLOTH ON *FOREHEAD, AS THOUGH SUFFERING FROM A HANGOVER.)* } ital.

I sat for Paul again last night.
The expression on my face in the portrait is so solemn.
I said, "Why so, Paul?"
He said, "It's an expression of defiance.
You're sitting on the pot and you won't shit.
I always told you you were full of it."
After that there was nothing for it but
to get out the Bordeaux and we got so plastered that
I ended up on my hands and knees baying
like a hound and chasing Paul around the studio

A MEETING WITH GEORGE DUREAU

Max E. Verga

"The photographer and his subjects have entered into a shared enterprise, whose purpose is to record not only outward appearances, but an inner sense of worth in the person being photographed—achieved sometimes against overwhelming odds." -

Edward Lucie-Smith on George Dureau

Several years ago, photographs by George Dureau accompanied an article I wrote for "Drummer," a magazine designed for Fetish and S&M enthusiasts. As a regular "Drummer" contributor, I had always tried to stretch boundaries by including characters that did not fit the usual over-endowed stud image. Entitled "Different Bodies," my article explored the relationships between able-bodied men and men with disabilities. "Drummer" built a feature, "Maimed Beauty," around the story and then decided to add photographs by George Dureau.

The magazine received more letters about "Maimed Beauty" than any other feature. Partly in response to those overwhelmingly positive letters, I wrote another piece about disability, this time fiction, called "Chester." "Drummer" published that, too, also with illustrations by George Dureau.

George is a New Orleans artist who often photographs local men with disabilities. Since I'd already decided to visit New Orleans, I thought I'd track down George and try to arrange a meeting. True to the tradition of Southern hospitality, I found myself invited to his home for lunch. George lives in the lower part of the French Quarter in an area once notorious for drug deals in the park facing his house. By the time I got to see it, the neighborhood had reverted to its earlier, quiet state. I even saw a few Yuppies in the park.

with him playing the fox and screeching
so eerily it sent chills up my spine
though I was laughing till I couldn't see.

(LAUGHING, HE CLUTCHES HIS HEAD IN PAIN.)

This morning I walked into a lamppost.
Embarrassing. I heard a
"Watch out!" too late.
I had been staring at a young man
boarding a coach for Cahors.

(ATTENDANT ENTERS, CROSSES TO WICKER CHAIR, MOVES IT DOWNSTAGE TO WITHING ACHILLE'S SIGHT. ATTENDANT SITS IN CHAIR, MIMING THE PART OF THE YOUNG MAN, RAOUL, AS ACHILLE DESCRIBES HIM.)

So handsome—his eyes caught mine,
his malacca stick, gleaming boots,
stern black beard, new top hat.
Young man, I wanted to share your carnage.
What will you do in Cahors?
Transfer to Bordeaux, to Paris?
What is your profession?
I stared after the carriage
and though it was raining hard,
I fancied I saw him turn
and stare back through the oval rear window
like a portrait of a famous man
slowly disappearing.
Once the coach had gone out of sight,
my eyes fixed on the patch of dry ground
it had left beneath it.
I waited and waited
till the rain filled it in
and I looked up and there before me
long, brown, monotonous,
the old road to Cahors.

(ATTENDANT DROPS CHARACTER OF YOUNG MAN AS HE CROSSES TO ACHILLE AND TAKES CLOTH FROM HIM. ACHILLE TAKES OLD STRAW HAT FROM SHELF OF NIGHTSTAND AND PUTS IT ON, TAKES UP PALETTE AND BRUSH. AT THE SAME TIME, ATTENDANT REPLACES CLOTH IN SMALL DISH, PUTS PEAR ON NIGHTSTAND AND EXITS.)

The light is famous here:

Bob: In my experience the caring sometimes doesn't show through the single-minded persistence.

Alan: The potential negative character we mentioned earlier is the possible control-freak aspect, but lots of people have that anyway, without the disability fetish! What I'm saying is: disabled men are probably going to do better going for the Gold, the solid, emotional connection with a partner, than they are going for the Silver, the superficial attraction of sex with such horny men as may be culled from the bars. I think that we have, between us, made at least a case for the idea that a vein of solid, relational gold exists within every fetishist. As I see it, this gold offered by the fetishist may be more available to the disabled man than either the silver or the other gold, that harder-to-find lucky strike offered by men who are both congenial and have an entirely neutral stance in relation to disability.

Bob: And how do you answer those who respond by saying, "This is all so much psycho-babble. These people with the disability fetish are SICK!"

Alan: I would say this is a legitimate and understandable point of view, but you should know I think it will keep you this side of the impasse we have described, and I would invite you to look at what the implications are for you of keeping yourself on this side. To the extent that you are on the lookout for sickness, you will fear it and see it, and find it, and label it, and it will be real. And you will be doing exactly what nondisabled society does to the disabled.

If your greater interest is to look for connection, you will find that this inevitably means becoming curious about taking on some other guy's emotional baggage, finding that it's connected in some way with your own, and both of you somehow learning to bear the joint burden.

the white shutters dazzle,
the yellow highlights dazzle,
the soft rust of brick barns:
ah, that would make anyone cry.

I'm getting sunburnt,
painting by the quarry
all day in Paul's old straw hat:

(REMOVES HAT, CONTEMPLATING IT.)

I wear it for good luck–
as if genius could be transmitted
through a hat!

(HE MAKES A MOTION TO THROW HAT AWAY, THINKS BETTER OF IT, AND PUTS IT BACK ON. RESUMES PAINTING.)

Often I wonder if I would have done better
as another kind of artist—a poet—
but where are the words?
A sculptor? But I live in color.
A musician? But I can't hold a note.
It's the plasticity, the sensuousness
that attracts me to paint.
The smell of it.

(PASSING BRUSH UNDER HIS NOSE, LIKE A GOOD CIGAR.)

The texture of taut linen–
the tsk-tsk naughty-naughty
violation of the white-priest-goddam-
Jesus-white of the canvas
that seduces me.
I've got that canvas at my mercy.
I can say: I am going to take you
With my tsk-tsk.
Hear it–that's my music.
Feel it–that's my sculpture.
See it–that's my final joy.

(BUSINESS OF CLEANING BRUSHES.)

I was thinking about the old days
at the Art School so I decided to
take a walk 'round some of our old haunts.
I went to look at the Zola dam

Bob: Your analysis invites only one reply: Step out of the box you've put yourself in. Try your luck testing encounters with, among others, some of the people we've agreed to call fetishists.

Alan: Not breaking through the impasse seems to me like settling for less. You see, and this is a kind of hobbyhorse of mine, I also want to say that I think the bars are rotten venues for disabled men. In fact, they're rotten venues for anybody who's looking for a relationship. Now one of the problems with what I've just said is that disabled men want sex, too, so why not go to a place where it's easy to find? But as a psychotherapist, I'm also saying (and this doesn't always go down well in the gay community) that love is more important than sex. And it's also true that disabled men are not going to do as well, in general, in the purely sexual arena.

As I see it, they need to say to themselves that that arena, the arena where guys are looking only for the stereotypical Body Beautiful, is not one where I may expect to excel. But who knows what I can do in the emotional arena? Now, this may seem ironic, but I think that disabled gay men's best chances in the emotional arena lie on the other side of the impasse presented by the disability fetish. This is because—and I wish I knew more about this so I could make a stronger case—but my guess is that the fetishizers of the disabled are going to be very strong and interesting people emotionally, as indicated by the fact that they haven't fallen for the standard fetishes.

They probably have a strong caring element, which is a valuable human capacity. They are persistent in the face of the rejection and the prejudice they encounter from disabled and nondisabled alike, which shows how very important and emotionally driven are their desires and their underlying vulnerabilities.

and up past the Bibémus quarry.
Those days were always hot
and sunny so it seems now.
We scratched our legs on briars,
ate bread and cheese and drank cheap wine
in the shade of the little shack
by the quarry. We all wrote
poems and declaimed them
to each other. They were awful of course
but we were so passionate.

(PICKS UP PEAR.)

I wish I'd known Paul in those days
when he was young and
before he got bitter,
before I got bitter.
Those were the days
when you just created
for the hell of it. You didn't care
what the old farts at the Art School said.
You smiled to yourself
and did the opposite.
You trailed your paints
and canvas up to the quarry
and painted till you were sick
from the sun, you were dizzy
from the wine, the birds chattered
louder than usual,
and all the while
you smiled to yourself
and muttered your latest
epic in iambics
under your breath.

(SPEAKS NEXT TWO LINES AS THOUGH DELIVERING A MOCK ORATION TO THE PEAR, HOLDING IT BEFORE HIM)

I was so in love, with you, pear,
that after I had painted you

(DROPS ORATOR POSE.)

I couldn't eat you.
You were so tempting.
I was so hungry

boyfriends, tricks, lovers, and girlfriends. It's hard for us to befriend someone who rejects us sexually.

Bob: Very hard.

Alan: Yes, but it might be very useful—and interesting. Remember, it cuts both ways. It's equally hard for someone we reject. After all, what have you and I been talking about but a disabled man who rejects a fetishist? He may in fact, be especially vulnerable to such rejection. Now, might it be valuable for that disabled man to say to his suitor, "Look, I'm not interested at all in going to bed with someone who fetishizes my disability, but I'd like to get to know you and find out what makes you tick."

Here is where the other side of the equation comes in: surely this is where the fetishist has to be willing to make his leap in the direction of confronting those things which make him most vulnerable. Surely if he's sensitive, intelligent, and a little bit experienced, he'll be interested in learning to stop the exaggerated behavior you've called drooling and look at the realities of forging a relationship. So we come to see that what I said earlier was too simplistic. We see now that, if it is our hope for the disabled man to gain greater comfort in his dealings with the fetishist, we must also expect the fetishist to try to become comfortable with exposing his vulnerability to scrutiny.

I think these questions are not just rhetorical or hypothetical. From what I know about disabled gay men it seems they tend to think their best prospects are with men who just don't care about the disability, it's just not an issue, because they have so much else in common—interests, personalities, styles—that a disability is a minor dimension. Their hope is to find these men in the course of ordinary social life, which may include some forays into gay bars. Now, this is an attractive goal. But the problem of the minority within a minority within a minority applies here too. And what do you do while you're waiting to find just that right niche?

(REPLACES PEAR.)

But I left you on the sill
to rot in your own good time.

(FADE TO SPECIAL ON PEAR, THEN QUICK BLACKOUT.)

Aix is hissing
and steaming like an exotic kettle–
all red lilies, yellow light
and insects.
I went for a walk this morning
in the fields opposite.
The grass comes up over my head.

(ATTENDANT COMES ON IN SHIRTSLEEVES BAREFOOT, AND MIMES ACTION OF BOY IN GRASS MAKING LOVE, AND OTHER ACTIONS AS ACHILLE DESCRIBES THEM.)

Suddenly I came upon a pair
of young men making love in the grass,
quite naked. I was embarrassed
but they were unabashed.
For a moment I wondered
what it would be like
to be one of them. Then one of them
said, "Care to join us, little man?"
I couldn't help blushing.
"No, I'm not that way," I said.
"Come now," said the other, Sounds anachronistic. Maybe "darling"?
"a little cutie like you?"
They giggled. I stepped back.

(ATTENDANT RUNS OFF WITH "FRIEND.")

They were from the Art School no doubt.
How times change!
Imagine if Paul and I were students now...
He would have to drink a lot of wine.
He would have to drink an awful lot of wine.

There are times–
perhaps two or three times a month,
I don't really remember how often–
when I feel a great surge of energy
flow through my body, an overwhelming
desire for movement I myself cannot perform.

caring for a person, which is positive. And surely courage is something the fetishist must also have. He's taking a risk, as you point out, simply by approaching the object of his desire.

All of this tells me that there has to be a vulnerability to the person with this fetish, which we are inclined—for well-known reasons—to overlook. Even though we don't understand it at present, is it too much to ask disabled men to grant their admirers at least the acknowledgment of some underlying vulnerability?

Bob: You have come up with another radical concept. That we may be so busy nursing our own vulnerabilities that we don't see anyone else's. The concept of "I'm not the only vulnerable person around here" certainly would tend to make the playing field more level. And it appears to tie in to some degree with what I said earlier about the many ways in which, with Raoul, I was the one looking after him. His vulnerabilities were accessible to me.

Alan: Yes. It seems it may feel easier when you can take on board the possibility that the other guy has something he needs help with. Perhaps this is the hidden other side of the moon. So you might begin by trying to diminish your prejudice toward the fetishist, at least enough to test some of what I've been saying, by talking to these people, seeing what they're like.

Bob: By recognizing that they're not all creeps. But another challenge is the small number of men we're dealing with—a minority within a minority within a minority. Suppose a guy finds me attractive because I'm an amputee. So we go out for coffee and it turns out he's an opera queen and I'm a '49ers fan, he likes red meat and I'm a vegetarian.

Alan: Granted. Although to pursue my point, I think this is precisely where the most useful testing can take place, in conditions where thoughts of romance have been abandoned. One of the absolutely most difficult things we face as gay men is making friends when one of us rejects the other sexually. That becomes a very hard friendship issue. We can only do

I visualize myself running through
long grasses in a strange bluish field,
grasses so tall that they brush against
my thighs; and my thighs are those
of a healthy young man of sixteen
or seventeen: smooth, white and glistening
with sweat from the exertion and with dew
from the grasses; never a body attached
to the legs, merely the legs themselves;
perfect, powerful, running on forever
through the stiff green blades.
Other times I am a complete being,
a distant gray figure spinning
like a top or a whirlwind dancer
away across the fields, through the
orchards, through the walls of the
red-roofed farmhouses, out over the
hills I go with this phantom of
myself, out through the mists to the
moonlit sea, and mingle with the
gulls spiraling
upward
to the stars.

(BLACKOUT. QUICK FADE UP.)

I've had the most incredible stroke of luck.
I've actually sold a painting—
for fifty francs!
I sold it to the woman my friend Alphonse
works for—he does her garden.
Fifty francs for a piece of wisteria!
She must be crazy.
She says she'll hang it in her living room.
She's getting old, you see, and won't
be able to sit in her garden much longer
so my painting will be the next best thing.
She wrote me a letter:
"Young man, (I like that—
'young man'!) you must go to Paris
and ply your wares." And you know what?
I'm going! I bought my train ticket,

— Seems odd that old age should prevent her from sitting in garden. How about "get to her garden." Or "walk in her garden."?

(ATTENDANT ENTERS, PUTS PEAR AND PAUL'S HAT ON PROP TABLE, MOVES NIGHTSTAND TO WICKER CHAIR, TAKES COAT AND BOATER FROM ARMOIRE AND HELPS ACHILLE PUT THEM ON.)

Bob: Yes. If I, obviously disabled, walk into a bar and cruise somebody I think is hot, what if he returns the look? I don't know if he's interested in my cruise or merely curious about my appearance.

Alan: Right. Obviously physically disabled people are used to attracting attention. It's confusing because bar etiquette says that if you're looking, you're interested, but you can't assume that. If he's looking, he might not be interested; and conversely, because the disabled in our society are stigmatized, an interested nondisabled man might be embarrassed to make an overture, for fear of being associated with the stigma. So, if he's not looking, he may yet be interested.

Bob: That's very true. Either way, many of us are sensitive to approaches from the nondisabled. We can be hard to cruise by them. Broadside targeting of disabled men by nondisabled men can be an instant turnoff. Too many unpleasant associations.

Alan: He may or may not be a drooler . . .

Bob: But the disabled guy is all too likely going to assume, "Oh, no. Another idiot. Another pity-monger. Another creep."

Alan: Yes. I've been acquainted with enough disabled people in therapy to recognize that as a powerfully negative counter-stereotype, arising for reasons which are very, very understandable: disabled people are subjected to all kinds of undesired approaches. And yet I think it's important for the guy in the chair to be prepared to relinquish that stereotype, because the particular nondisabled guy in question may or may not be a creep.

What is so striking to me about the disability fetish is that it's not the "normal" one; you're not supposed to have this one. This tells me that the person has something interesting about him, he has his own agenda that's specific, one that's not the usual prepackaged agenda sold to us. Now I think there's already evidence of sensitivity in that agenda, something of

packed a portfolio of drawings and
some provisions. Marie says I'm irresponsible.
I should save the money for the children.
"Wait till I'm rich and famous," I say.
"Then the children can have everything
their little hearts desire."
"That's what they all say," she replies.
Why does she have to put a wet blanket
over everything? Besides, I won't spend
it all. I can stay at Paul's...
Mind you it is a dreadful trip up there—
the horrors of third class:
Farmers with chickens, peasant women
with caterwauling babies, cantankerous
old men coughing and spitting, drunks
cursing. And in this heat! Phew!
Ah, but who cares? I bought a new suit
for the occasion. Just the ticket
for gay Paris! Just the ticket!

May produce inappropriate laughter.

SCENE TWO: PARIS

(ATTENDANT SCOOPS UP ACHILLE AND TRANSFERS HIM TO WICKER CHAIR. ACHILLE TAKES BRUSH AND MIMES PAINTIN THROUGHOUT NEXT SPEECH.)

I'm in Paris at last!
It's glorious—almond trees
like pink fireworks,
the Seine a blue satin ribbon,
Notre Dame like a beneficent
dinosaur presiding over us.
I sat all day under its gaze
and painted with Paul.
I didn't dare to look at his canvas.
I kept thinking, in ten years which of Europe's
famous galleries will house this one?
Paul encourages me as always.
He has a big heart and
a lying tongue.
But I wouldn't change places
with him. He feels his loneliness more.

Paul's painting is very strange now.
He sees nature as cylinders,
tetrahedrons, God knows what.

Bob: I think I understand what you're saying, and I believe that you're saying it not so much because you feel it's necessarily what we should do, but more to illustrate the map of the territory where, out of necessity, we disabled gay men find ourselves operating.

Alan: Yes, exactly. It's less a should than a "what if?" There are many, many gaps remaining to be filled in. And the other thing I have of course been doing is focusing on the disabled man's side of the equation, principally because I have worked with a number of gay men with disabilities. We need to explore corresponding possibilities for behavior change on the part of the nondisabled fetishist. I'm sure of this, but, as I've said, I have never met such a person and, at this stage, can only speculate.

Bob: Many of the personals ads I've read seem to cry out for understanding, but one aspect puzzles and irritates me: why are so many of these men so stuck on fetishizing particular and only particular disabilities? "I'm not interested in quads, thank you very much, I'm interested only in CPs with black hair and mustaches who use crutches, NOT a wheelchair." Doesn't this make a mockery of the attempt to find someone? How many potential responders can possibly exist?

Alan: It gets so narrow, right. But on the other hand, with the Internet and other more widely accessible sources of communication, there's a new sort of reality at work. You can find niches, sometimes. People do. The personals listings in your Webzine, "Bent," might allow people the chance to find exactly what they desire, at least in terms of the category of person. And that can be just as true for your disabled advertisers as it is for the nondisabled ones. There's a big leap from the category to the actual person, but it's a start.

Given that caveat (and without minimizing its importance), I believe that something like the Internet is a much better vehicle than, say, the bars. My understanding is that cruising the bars is fraught with complications for gay men with disabilities.

I tell him he's more of a solid
geometer than an
"Impressionist."
He says that I draw like Seurat. I've never heard of Seurat!

(HE STOPS PAINTING ATENDANT ENTERS, MOVES VELVETEEN CHAIR AGAINST BACK WALL, DRAPES ROBE OVER IT. PICKS UP PORTFOLIO AND CHARCOAL.).)

If you half close your eyes
things get blurred and uncertain.
You see only blocks of color—
chunks of forms.
When you look at a scene
with your eyes wide open
only a small area is in sharp focus
at any one time.
But what's in your peripheral vision
beckons you and says, "I am sharp too."
Then you look back to the center
and that's sharp.
And then back and forth, back and forth.
Our eyes deceive us.
Our brains make fools of us.

(ACHILLE MOTIONS TO ATTENDANT, WHO BRINGS HIM PORTFOLIO AND CHARCOAL.ACHILLE BEGINS SKETCHING. ATTENDANT EXITS.)

Only our hearts know what is strong and real
Trust your heart, my mother used to say.
So I did.
I painted.

(PAUSE)

Then my mother said:
"Why can't you do something useful?"

I can't stand it when people look
over my shoulder when I'm copying.
"My goodness," says an old dame, "it looks
just like Titian. Aren't you clever!"
"Yes," I say, "I am.
I am very clever and you, madam, are only one
of many who have remarked on the fact."

(THROWS SKETCHBOOK TO THE FLOOR.)

that doesn't come easily. When, having completed your undressing, you were suddenly offering your Self to that trick, that was very appealing, in fact, because ultimately he wanted that.

Bob: I can see that clearly now, although I don't think I saw it then, or at least not so clearly.

Alan: I want to try again to go a little further here. I would like to suggest that, if you're comfortable with you, and if you are offering your Self, then it doesn't matter if the other person is fetishizing a part of you, because your Self permeates the part you're offering. I think it's possible to do both, to fetishize and to personalize, in parallel in the same relationship.

Now I have a question, or proposition to pose, which at this stage I will qualify as very tentative and simplistic. Maybe the key to success for disabled men who find themselves at the receiving end of the kind of attention we have been describing as the disability fetish is to offer the fetishized part, but to be sure to offer the Self with it. Admittedly, some fetishists will balk at that. They'll want only the part, because dealing with the human being is too complicated. This reminds me of what you said earlier about "droolers," those you see as absolutely unwilling or unable to connect. But I think even this can be reframed: I think almost every one of them would learn to connect, to personalize, if only given enough time. Of course, many will need much more time than most of their contacts would be able to stand, or would want to allow them.

Bob: You're saying: If guys with disabilities could only stand the drooling long enough, then . . .

Alan: . . . one day you might wake up and feel loved in a way that works. I humbly concede it's a very, very big IF, presupposing an all-but-saintly capacity for bringing the Self, and the desire to understand the partner, to the relationship.

Paul is under strain.
He always has some "damnable business"
plaguing him.
Finally I got angry and said,
"I suppose your father
hasn't sent the money again."
He picked up one of my drawings and
began ever so slowly to tear it in half.
"Say that again," he said, "and I'll go
all the way."

The strangest thing happened today.
1was looking at the masks in an antique shop
in the Rue des Épins—
devils with vampire teeth,
dragons with scales like dying leaves,
Chinamen with parchment smiles—when all of a sudden

(ATTENDANT ENTERS AS RAOUL, THE MAN FROM THE COACH TO CAHORS, READING A LITTLE VOLUME OF POETRY. HE SPOTS ACHILLE, STROLLS OVER TO HIM FROM BEHIND. ON CUE, "Hand touched my shoulder," RAOUL DOES SO.)

I felt a presence behind me,
slightly to the left,
a shadow in the window.
For some reason I remembered the dry patch
under the coach going to Cahors—
just an image, I thought,
a trick of memory.
A hand tapped my shoulder.
I turned. A voice said, "My name is Raoul.
Haven't we met?"

(ATTENDANT, AS RAOUL, CROUCHES DOWN ON RIGHT SIDE OF CHAIR BY ACHILLE AND WATCHES HIM PAINT AND MIMES ACTION DESCRIBED BY ACHILLE.)

Raoul is watching me paint.
'More shadow on the right," he says.
He's a poet. What does ho know?
"More red. On the left. Right there," he says
and he has the audacity to put his finger
on the canvas. Then he adds, "But it's
brilliant nevertheless."

Alan: And there's the conflict, the incongruity again. The disabled man is trying to hide what his would-be partner may find inherently desirable.

Bob: Yes, and, in my experience, it is not the only conflict attached to trying to hide my disability. I have noticed that I'm very much happier, more at ease when I'm over the stage of hiding, and here I'm not talking in the context of fetishists, but generally. When I was younger and in the market for sexual partners, I suffered great anxiety cruising somebody, but once we got past the point of shucking our clothes and getting into bed, for some reason I was OK.

Alan: That's very interesting.

Bob: It's as if once we got past the preliminaries, I could feel enough confidence that the guy found something attractive about me, and then once I got rid of the wooden legs, which I have a strong sense of being "not me" . . .

Alan: Then it didn't matter.

Bob: Then it didn't matter, because what they're getting is really me and, at a certain level, difficult as it might be to reach that level, I'm comfortable with me.

Alan: And I think that's really the key, Bob, your accessing your own level of comfort. As you remove parts, your prostheses, that are not really you, and present who you actually are, by that time you have enough confidence in yourself and your partner for the night, that you feel at ease, you can offer your Self, which is a great turn-on. But I think a lot of people disengage from what they're offering. Sometimes, for example, gay men almost literally become their cocks. Listen to the personals; a lot of them say: "I'm seven inches." They over-identify with the cock, they over-fetishize it, and their partners do, too. So it becomes more like two body parts having sex instead of two people.

You know, underneath all this fetishistic disengagement from Self, I think one of our greatest difficulties, but one of our greatest desires, is to connect with another Self, something

(RAOUL KISSES ACHILLE ON CHEEK, MUSSES ACHILLE'S HAIR, AND CROSSES TO SIT IN VELVETEEN CHAIR, READING HIS BOOK.)

Well, I think, maybe he does know something.
He reminds me rather of Paul
when he was younger—the same darkness,
that brooding quality.
it's strange; it's as if I'm falling
In love!
Perhaps it's Paris and the wine,
the spring air,
my new painting,
Raoul's new poem.
Yet, whenever he's not here,
even for a second,
I feel abandoned like a child
lost at the zoo, the animals scratching at their cages,
baring their teeth at me.

(RAOUL TAKES MIRROR FROM PROP TABLE, WALKS OVER TO ACHILLE, HANDS HIM MIRROR, STANDS BEHIND CHAIR LOOKING OVER ACHILLE'S SHOULDER.)

The trouble with dark eyes
Is that they're so hard to read.
Raoul's eyes are dark violet
and you can't see beneath all that
shining.

(LOOKING IN MIRROR.)

On the other hand my eyes are pale green.
"I can read you like a book," says Raoul.
"You're an open book. You're all feeling."

The reflection of a reflection
goes off to infinity.
Sometimes I look in the mirror
and hold up a small hand mirror
under my chin
and angle it in such a way
that there's a second reflection of me
in the big mirror—
smaller, lower right,
going off to nothing.
What a pair we make:
An image and its diminutive.
When I scowl, he scowls.

and by practice, by talking to each other a lot, we found the kind of equilibrium that allowed us to function as a couple for quite a while.

Alan: Maybe what your positive experience tells us is that the whole notion of fetish is oppressive, maybe we need to blur it out of existence. Perhaps we need to see that people have attractions we might at the present find unconventional, but the trick is to do what you and Raoul did, to allow time to subordinate those elements of attraction to the two people themselves, who are so much more complex and real. In that sense the feeling you mentioned earlier, "I come first and the fetish comes second" is valid. The fetish has to be subordinate to the relationship. But, as we have seen, it is also true, that the physical attraction, the fetish, usually comes before the relationship.

Bob: Sure. If I go into a bar, it's likely that the first man I find hot I'm attracted to because I like Roman noses and he's got the best example I've seen all week, not because I've chatted him up for half an hour first.

Alan: Yes, exactly. Wherever on his body that "Roman nose" is! After all, the first thing we see is the first thing we see. In a situation like that, if you get from bar to bed you're still initially seeing him as an object. But even at that point the object is weighted with emotion. And certainly the objectified body of the disabled man is very weighted with emotion for both partners. But as we've noted before, it may be difficult to find congruent, complementary emotions that cluster around those desired objects, simply because most disabled men understandably prefer to have the fact of their disability, or its particular physical manifestation, noticed as little as possible.

Bob: Oh, yes! In fact some of us still try to pass whenever we can and however preposterous the success of that goal may be.

When I pout, he pouts.
I brush back my hair—
which I must say is luxurious—
with my long delicate fingers.
He does the same.
I do this for minutes on end.
I know what some would think—
this is narcissism,
this is an illness.
But I want to see what's there,
how others see me:
smaller than I feel myself or see myself
more varied than I feel myself
or see myself,
more wonderful than I could ever know
unless I looked and looked.

(RAOUL TAKES MIRRROR FROM ACHILLE, HELPS HIM ON WITH SLING. ON "...Madame F.'s last night," RAOUL STARTS TO GO, TURNS, GIVES ACHILLE A LOOK. ON "...me relieve tensions," RAOUL EXITS WITH MIRROR AND HAT.)

I break bones easily.
I have my arm in a sling now.
I was at my friend, Madame F.'s
last night. She helps me relieve
tensions. I was about to relieve
my tension when I
tripped over the mat and broke
my collar bone. We both
started laughing. I couldn't stop
even though I was in agony.
I was still laughing when the doctor came.
He gave me a stern look,
There I was, half naked,
a married crippled painter
in a brothel and I'd broken
my collarbone and I was laughing.

Paul is impossible!
I shouldn't have gotten this involved.
I'll have to leave.
Everything I say and do is wrong.
If I say I like one of his paintings
he calls it rubbish
and throws a plate at the wall.
If I say he could do better,
he says, "You vile dwarf!

Bob: I don't know how typical I am, but I've had experiences that cover some of this territory. With most of the men I've had sex with there was no reference, even implicit, to fascination (or revulsion) with my disabled status or particular body parts; however I have made it with a small number of guys who flagged themselves as fetishists (though not one of them would have used that word, precisely because of the clinical, pejorative connotations you mentioned earlier). I met these guys through a personals ad many years ago, just after I had broken up with my partner of fifteen years.

Most of the men I met through that ad (which I ran in "Jarrod International", a small, ahead-of-its-time personals publication, now defunct) I found incompatible. I found that they were, well, body-part obsessive is the only way I can describe it.

Alan: You mean the disabled body parts?

Bob: Yes. Or missing body parts, or "disfigured" body parts. What I told myself at the time—and now I'm reexamining it all in light of this conversation—was that their particular interest didn't disgust me, it just didn't turn me on. More often than not, the single-mindedness of their approach bored me. Of course, a good part of it may also have been a kind of general incompatibility on other grounds, like music, food and politics!

After about half-a-dozen such misfires, I did connect successfully with someone who found me attractive for many reasons, including my disability. Raoul was a desirable partner for me for innumerable reasons; for one thing, he didn't focus on body parts or disability per se. Furthermore, he seemed not to obsess emotionally over those same issues in the way you and I were discussing earlier. We didn't have a conflict over caretaking. His concern that I didn't overtax my physical resources was something I came to accept as useful to me, and I didn't experience myself as on the bottom emotionally, perhaps because I knew how dependent he was on my caretaking in many, many areas of his life. By stumbling along together, by default,

Can't you tell genius when you see it?"

(ACHILLE REMOVES SLING, WORKS ARM A BIT.)

Politics invades everything.
The insidious cockroaches
of art— the gallery owners,
the art dealers, the Salon
committee members, the entrepreneurs,
eat us up like crumbs.
That's if they like the taste
of us. Fussy cockroaches these.
You have to be tactful
and charming to get on.
I'm always saying the wrong thing:
I once told a gallery owner,
who had the taste of a low-class pimp,
that he had egg in his beard.
He was livid.
I meant it well.
He did have egg in his beard.

(RAOUL ENTERS WITH LETTER AND OTHER HAT, CROUCHES NEXT TO ACHILLE, GIVES HIM LETTER ON CUE, "I decided.")

Now that my work's been rejected again
by the Salon, I decided to write them a letter.
I'm rather pleased with it:

(READING)

"You are your own worst enemies.
If you persist in choosing
safe art, your Salon will rot
inwardly like a maggot-infested peach.
All good new art takes risks.
You have power, dear sirs:
use it to encourage progress
not the perpetration of defunct traditions
and moth-eaten sentiments.
Give us risk-takers the chance."

I think they might not like
the bit about the maggot-infested peach.

(RAOUL GIVES ACHILLE HAT, AND EXITS WITH LETTER AND SLING. ACHILLE DONS HAT AND TAKES CANE IN HAND)

Bob: Those simple words sound painlessly clinical, yet what they describe is very, very painful to feel.

Alan: Yes. And because this is so painful, and so crucial and specific, let me see if I can summarize where we are in this exploration. I believe that gay men often meet through a fetish. You like big cocks. I've got a big cock, we can make music. And then maybe we'll fall in love. So I do think that most gay men love the cock first and then the person. And that's easy to fetishize both ways, because everything in gay culture says "big-cock-equals-sexy."

But suppose I see you on crutches and a man with crutches is my ideal, for whatever reason in my personal history. But you think your crutches and perhaps your thin legs are ugly, so you won't be in a position even to try to understand my attraction. You may be frightened by my attraction. Your whole psycho-sexual history will be threatened by my interest because you have spent your life disidentifying with those parts instead of identifying with them. You and I may be disposed to like each other in a number of ways, but how on earth do we make music when we're in such emotional conflict on this pivotal issue? Is there even a way of getting through the issue?

Bob: I agree that this is the core question. It becomes less important, in practice, to ask where the disability fetish came from. It's more important to ask what do we do about it and with it in terms of relationships.

Alan: So, how do we continue the investigation? Where can we find the data? One of the things I would like to know—and I've never met people like this, but I believe we need to meet them and talk to them—is, what about disabled and nondisabled guys who make it, because their fetishes are complementary? The nondisabled guy who likes what the disabled guy has got and the disabled guy who likes his own stuff well enough so that he can say, "Yeah, let's go for it!"

I met a man taken with religion.
He stopped me in the Rue des Lumieres and took my hand.
"Pray, and tomorrow you will have a beautiful body like
mine."
"You are very conceited," I said. "And besides, I don't
believe in miracles."
These fanatics always seem to be hard of hearing.
He carried on with his discourse so I walked away.

I often wear a long greatcoat.
I walk with a cane.
I conceal my cane under
my greatcoat. I wear it
like a soldier wears his sword.
Why do women wear makeup?
Men wear wigs?
Politicians tell lies?

I'm at the Cafe Geurbois
watching the bourgeoisie
on their way to the Opera.
Here they are in all their finery,
all trying to outdo each other—
the country invades Culture.
These are the people who keep Verdi alive.
After the show some of them
will deign to stop here for a quick Pernod.
"That was the most lovely set for La Boheme I've ever seen..."
"Why Madame Melba is so fat..."
"Of course Melba is fading. We saw her as Aida last year and really..."
The speaker goes up ten points.
The listener goes down fifty,
because she failed to get tickets last year,
but not to worry, she manages to think of something:
"Well," she says, "we couldn't have
come anyway.
Poor Eugenie was so ill.
She had this nasty boil
on her neck and all this green pus started
oozing out—well, anyway..."

(PUTS HAT AWAY. LIGHTS CHANGE SLOWLY TO A NIGHTMARISH QUALITY.)

I'm broke again.
I dreamed that Zola was out for a walk
and I sneaked up behind him and stole 50 centimes out of his pocket.

"other stump," if that's your disability, is as sexy as that first one. You are probably not going to see it as a sexual thing, but as an object very, very different.

Bob: Speaking from experience, I can tell you are absolutely right.

Alan: So maybe it—whatever body part or "condition" the disabled owner is unhappy with—becomes in his own eyes unsexual, a reason for rejection.

Bob: Yes. Those body parts become emblems of shame and disgrace, never badges of erotic power.

Alan: Exactly. Except to people—we've agreed for this conversation to call them fetishists—who are turned on by the stump or whatever other . . .

Bob: I think we've gotten hung up on stumps! Probably my fault . . .

Alan: We've been using "stump" to stand in for the whole range of disabilities. It's a handy symbol because it's so phallic. The point we don't want to lose here is that the man who is turned on by certain physical parts or features has already sexualized them, whereas the chance that the disabled owner of those parts is going to eroticize them is small. To him they have a different meaning, probably a very antisexual meaning. They have been incorporated into the feeling that, "Gee, I'm not attractive, I'll never find someone." It's the part of his body that feels least erotic, even though to the admirer it may feel most sexual.

It's asking the disabled man to do a lot to eroticize, to fetishize, something he has anti-fetishized. Whereas if you're turned on by sculpted abs, it won't be difficult to find someone with those abs who thinks they're as sexy as you do, who wants to show them off, who wants you to admire them. As with the conflict over emotional dependence we talked about earlier, what we're describing is another way of talking about the lack of congruity between the admirer and the object of the admiration.

When I got home
I hid the money under my pillow.
I went to sleep and dreamed that
the money had multiplied
into thousands of francs—
each coin the size of a millstone
and they were stacked up in piles
all over my room.
There was a knock at the door.
I tried to get across the room
but I couldn't dislodge the coins.
I used my stick as a crowbar,
I beat on the coins to try to dislodge them—
all to no avail.
I sat down on the bed and cried.
Suddenly a voice called, "Achille, Achille,
are you in there?"
It was Zola.
"I'm sick," I said. "I can't get to the door.
I'm sorry."
"Come out," he said, "Come out and face me
like a man."

(BLACKOUT. RAOUL ENTERS IN DARK AND STRIKES MATCH, LIGHTS PIPE AS LIGHTS FADE UP.)

In the dark back booths of smoke-filled bars,
what do they say to you, Raoul?
What do they say about me?
"Surely you don't spend time with him, do you?
You must feel sorry for him. It is sad
and of course he knows Cézanne, but really!"

(RAOUL TAKES CAFÉ CHAIR, CROSSES TO BESIDE ACHILLE DURING THIS NEXT STANZA AND SITS.)

Raoul doesn't like my new portrait of him.
Ho covered it with a cloth.
"I don't mean to be unkind," he said,
"but it just isn't me."

(THEY ARE AT THE MOULIN ROUGE. RAOUL IS ENJOYING IT, ACHILLE IS NOT.)

I finally summoned up the courage
to go to The Moulin Rouge—
Raoul talked me into it.
It struck me as rowdy and pretentious.

friend calls them the droolers. Another friend, an amputee, put it this way: "Love me, love my stump—but love me first!" His point being that he wanted to be loved for the totality of himself and that if his stump provided a jolt of additional sexual energy, great, but he does not want to play "also-ran" to his own stump.

Alan: You know, and this is the point I would like us to consider: It may simply be a question of waiting for the shift in attention. In gay life, whether it's biceps or a mustache or glasses or crutches or a stump, I believe that the physical attraction—anatomical or prosthetic—nearly always comes first. Then, if it's longer than a one-night stand, the physically appealing parts begin to get folded into the whole personality, not the other way around. 0f course, it can happen the other way around—the way I don't doubt many disabled men would prefer—but I strongly believe this is how it usually is for us gay men.

Don't we all look at the "fetish" first, then the person? One conclusion you could come to is: If someone is interested in what you've got, play that card. So my hope, my wish, for the disabled man is that he may achieve some measure of comfort in playing the card he has.

Bob: This is radical. If I understand you, what you're saying to disabled readers is: The disability fetish may be the road leading to the intimate relationship you want, so wouldn't it be useful if you could accept this kind of attention? Even more radical: from what you said earlier about corresponding co-fetishes (the Daddy's Son, the Robber's Cop), are you wondering about men with disabilities actually getting into the fetish?

Alan: Yes, it's all very well to be sitting here theorizing, but we are now down to the wire. This is where the disability fetish is different from the other fetishes. Let's look at that. Say you happen to have a big dick. You can certainly use that as your calling card. It's easy for you to use because you probably value a big dick, too. You think, "Ah, well that's sexy, and I've got one of those sexy things, so I'll use it." But if you're disabled, you probably don't think your

Full of pseudo-artistes being daring.
Then my worst fears were realized:
An old buffer with yellow satin gloves
came up, bowed and said, "Do I have
the honor to address the Honorable
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec?"
"From what I hear," I replied,
"it's far from an honor to address
that dishonorable, drunken dauber.
Take note, sir, that not all
bearded dwarfs are the same person.
I might also point out that I am
better looking and at least have the
distinction of finishing my paintings!"

(RAOUL BURSTS INTO LAUGHTER. HE GETS UP, GOES TO OTHER SIDE OF CHAIR, SITS ON FLOOR, HIS BACK AGAINST THE CHAIR.)

(DAYLIGHT)

Under the tamarind tree fanning itself
like a jaded peacock. Raoul tells me
a story he has told before:
It concerns an old man of Tuscany who said
he valued love more than his riches.
He gave away his riches to his boy lover
who invested them, doubled them
and left with the money in a boat
with a yellow sail. The sail was so
yellow, Raoul says, that it blazed like the sun;
like the sun, I repeat, snapping
off grass blades and arranging them
in a circle on my lap. And the old man
was left to wander distractedly and beg
in the streets. The old man's name was
Alonzo known ever after as The Great Lover
and the boy lover's name was Giorgio
known ever after as The Crafty One and
he married a mulatto dancer in Madrid
and was never heard of again,
and I look up at the tamarind tree
which drops a leaf courteously in my lap
in my circle of grass blades and I say,
"Come to the point, Raoul; tell me you're leaving me."

(RAOUL GETS UP, GIVES ACHILLE A LOOK, AND EXITS.)

were rejected, even self-rejected, simply because of their gayness. And even if they grow up to be beautiful swans they still conceal an ugly duckling, the rejected part, which, in one way and another, continues to suffer rejection! Those gym-toned hunks are rejecting each other all the time. And, sometimes, we lesser mortals reject them.

Bob: We experience rejection not only in love, either, but rejection by parents, by straight peers, by other gay men . . . by God.

Alan: Then on top of all that, disabled gay men have various body types that are not now, never have been, and may well never be, seen as perfect, almost by definition. So given this perfection-obsession that is so much a part of masculine fantasy life, disabled men are going to endure a double dose of rejection. Now here is where the big question, the startling question, arises: Is it possible that the fetish element might be useful to disabled men?

Bob: The answer you imply is: Yes, the disability fetish can be useful to us.

Alan: It is a very radical-seeming idea. Let me try to lay out the basis of my inquiry. Firstly, some qualifications: I am aware we haven't yet fully dealt with the problem of the disability fetish's inbuilt potential to lead to a clash over care giving of the kind you experienced with Danny. I'm proposing we put that problem aside for a moment, to be looked at again later. The other qualification, of course, is that I'm aware that not all disabled men will be interested in nondisabled men. This inquiry will only be of interest to those who are.

But let us also remember that fetishes are important to gay men across the board. In fact, our whole culture is highly fetishized. In a funny way, disabled men have a built-in fetish for those who are into their disability.

Bob: The only problem being that a lot of us crips, maybe most of us, tend to be turned off by this fact. I've spoken to many guys who have found the attention of their nondisabled admirers a little bit, how shall I say this, "single-minded." Oh, hell, kinky is what I mean. One

I only have fifty centimes left.
I admit defeat.
Madame F. is sending money.
I'm going home.

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO NIGHT, INTERIOR OF COACH. ACHILLE TAKES HAT AND CANE IN HAND.)

I'm sitting in the coach for Aix, Raoul
It's raining. Now it's my turn to leave.
All those talks we had—Hugo, David,
Titian, Couperin.
Never a word from you, not even a note.
If only you'd left an address...
The coach is passing the Café Loup—
I remember a night...

(ATTENDANT ENTERS, TAKES ACHILLE'S CANE, AND BEATS IT SEVERAL TIMES LOUDLY ON THE FLOOR.)

Some children are knocking on the side
of the coach, making faces at me, so I shout,
"Go away, you little brats!"

(ATTENDANT THROWS CANE TO GROUND, RUNS AWAY.)

And as though
I had cut a cord that held them to me,
they snap back out of sight,
back to the hubbub of Paris,
down the tunnel of the past.

(ALL LIGHTS UP. ATITENDANT ENTERS, HIS MANNER BRISK, EFFICIENT, IMPERSONAL. HE TAKES RICKETY CHAIR, PLACES IT WHERE VELVETEEN CHAIR WAS AT THE OPENIG, PUTS RUNDOWN TABLE BESIDE CHAIR. HE CROSSES TO ACHILLE, WHO RELUCTANTLY SURRENDERS HIS HAT. ATTENDANT TAKES HAT AND PORTFOLIO, PUTS HAT ON PROP TABLE AND LEANS PORTFOLIO AGAINST OLD CHAIR. ATTENDANT CROSSES BACK TO ACHILLE, PAUSES, SCOOPS UP ACHILLE, AND CARRIES HIM TO OLD CHAIR. ATTENDANT SETS POSTCARDS, WINE BOTTLE, GLASS, AND PEAR, ON TABLE, AND EXITS. PARIS LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

SCENE THREE: AIX-EN-PROVENCE

I live in a family of ignoramuses.
None of my children is artistic in the least.

Alan: That's a fine example of the absence of the complementary fetish: he obviously felt a need to take care of you in a way that you did not need.

Bob: In a way that I found demeaning. Alan, the way you're describing the disability fetish—as involving an Emotional Top with a need to take care of someone he sees as vulnerable— that seems terribly unappealing to me, since the whole dynamic is informed by a belief-system that implies Disabled equals needing care. That equation is a real red flag for me.

Alan: Yes. Like many disabled people you tend to be extremely able, you can indeed cut your meat. You've had, I imagine, to learn very consciously to do certain things that the rest of us take for granted. You're responsible; you like to do things for yourself and you, like the rest of us, like to be in control.

So Danny was coming into direct conflict with your own need for power and agency. I imagine that kind of clash occurs frequently. That being said, I believe that most disabled men, like most people, want to be loved. And, like most gay men, I believe they want to be loved through their bodies. Now, while physical perfection seems a quintessential gay male icon— don't we, all of us, want to have powerful, sexy, perfect bodies . . .

Bob: Perfect, symmetrical bodies; I also think that the ideal of symmetry equaling beauty is something that's built into us.

Alan: Yes, maybe biologically, as some think, and without a doubt culturally. That's an age-old image of beauty, at least in the West. If the disabled are not seen as symmetrical, they may not be seen as graceful, as powerful, as "perfect" and thus, by extension, as masculine. In the gay subculture, which fetishizes masculine beauty and perfection, disabled gay men have a problem from the start.

Now the "secret" that all therapists know is that all gay men, no matter how gorgeous, have been rejected many, many times, and are deeply wounded by that. Virtually all gay kids

All they can draw is conclusions, and not very
intelligent ones at that!
All Gaston does is add—he spends his money on horses.
All Sophie does is sew—she ignores
her husband.
All Alexander does is play chess—
he manages a store.
They're neither handsome nor ugly,
perfect nor deformed.
It amazes me how anyone as extraordinary
as myself could produce such ordinary offspring.
Well, I married an ordinary woman.

Today I'm going to the country
to see Carlo, my outrageous friend.
Carlo is obsessed with vegetables.
He grows them for aesthetic purposes.
I've never seen such specimens.
I wish I had a photographic camera.
I could never capture them.
God help us, they are obscene.
Carrots like cocks,
turnips like breasts
and lettuces
giving way, giving way.

Aren't they too small to resemble breasts? Cabbages, pumpkins?

I don't understand this line.

(ACHILLE TAKES POSTCARDS FROM TABLE.)

Marie has gone to stay with her mother
and taken the children with her.
I'm back sitting on the Art School steps.
"Postcards! Postcards!"
Each one takes only ten minutes to draw.
"Postcards!" Women's arses sell best.
"Dirty postcards!" Each one drawn with care.
"Postcards! Only a sou!"
Each one, a work of art. "Postcards!
Three for the price of two!"

(REPLACES POSTCARDS ON TABLE.)

I wanted to go and see Carlo today.
Alphonse told me not to go.
I asked him why
and he kept shaking his head.
I said, "There's something you're not
telling me, Alphonse."

make them good candidates for care taking. Remember, fetishes have to fit. If you want to be a Cop and you want me to be a Robber, I have to find it in me to want to be a Robber. My guess is that the able-bodied man who fetishizes the disabled man is going to want to care for that person. But suppose the caregiver's emotional needs are too—shall we call it—top-heavy; the would-be caregiver may wrest security and power from the other's disability. He may want to give a lot but also control a lot. Turn up the darkness and dysfunction, and in that way the Helper can easily turn into a Nurse Ratchet.

Bob: I had one very bad experience with someone who matched precisely the profile you're describing. It was hellish and it took me eighteen months to extricate myself from the relationship. He was exactly the controlling kind of Emotional Top you described, and I was not prepared to be the Emotional Bottom in the almost caricatured way that would have made him happy. And, again, like you, I'm not talking about sexual mechanics at all, but much more subtle issues. He was determined to help me whether I needed it or not!

There's one incident I'll never forget. We were at a restaurant with two friends. In the past I had said to Danny, "You know, I really don't need any help cutting my meat" (even though I don't have much of a right hand). Well, it seemed I finally got this across to him. So there we four were and I ordered a whole lobster, which can be messy to handle even for people with the full complement of fingers. Noticing that I was having some trouble, the friend to my right asked, very casually, very appropriately, "Can I help with that?" To which Dan replied, loudly, too loudly for a public place: "You touch that lobster and I'll break your hand!"

Alan: He wanted to do the lobster.

Bob: Or an even finer nuance: if he was prevented from helping me, nobody else was going to get away with it.

I followed him into the garden
and when he turned around
I noticed his hand was shaking.
'Just trust me," he said.
"Don't go."

Hunger scrapes at me—
a wooden spoon
gouging out a bowl.
I'm sick of bouillon and dry bread.
I could grow vegetables like Carlos but
I don't know how.
Neither does Marie.
Thank God for cafe au lait—
it fills my stomach,
winds me up like a musical box:
what is my tune?
The rustle of a leaf in summer wind,
or the whimpering of my children at night?
Alphonse asked me today
"How long is it
since you had a square meal?"
I had to count on my fingers.

I won't be going to Carlos's house.
I heard the rumor today.
Marie and the children live with Carlo now.
Alphonse, that coward, couldn't tell me.

(TAKES A DRINK.)

I'm glad Marie and the children are at Carlos's.
He was lonely.
They'll eat well.
He's a good cook
and what a gardener!

(THE LIGHTS CHANGE TO CAFE. LATE NIGHT. HE DRINKS.)

Here they come, straggling into the café
at one a.m.
What a motley crew—the bums,
the rejects of Aix—all artists
in the mind or in the bone.
Welcome," says old Maillot, the owner,
"Welcome, whoever you are."

Bob: Its comparative rarity may be hard to assess. I do know that you now can find a fair amount of disability fetishism online.

Alan: Perhaps more people are coming out with this fetish than before. I'm sure it exhibits "dark" sides, too. Undoubtedly some nondisabled men feel, "Oh, I'm not very good-looking, but this disabled guy will find me appealing simply because I'm abled." Again, this sort of calculation would not be unique to the disability fetish. Another problematic side would be the nondisabled's stereotype of the disabled person as The Saint—and wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all marry Saints! This Saint-with-a-Disability will be a caring person, someone who has suffered a lot, a wonderful person who has overcome his disability, who has climbed Mt. Everest in a wheelchair, so imagine what he's going to do for me emotionally!

Bob: And furthermore he's going to be appealingly innocent sexually because he's had no experience.

Alan: Right. Absolutely! He'll find me really hot; he'll appreciate me. I'm also hypothesizing that the fetishist of the disabled may also tend to be what I call an Emotional Top, someone who likes to be in control of the emotional field between himself and another; and that the disabled person, to respond to that fetish, has to be in some ways a Bottom, has to be someone who is going to be responsive to the emotional needs of this "more masculine" or more powerful person, the Abled person.

And so when you get a disabled person who does not have that personality, who doesn't have that interest, he's not going to respond to being fetishisized that way. Suppose he isn't a Saint. Or suppose he's the Emotional Top. He's not going to want to be fetishized in that manner—at any rate according to this hypothesis.

A further problem is that many disabled people are, in my experience, highly able, emotionally and physically. They can, in fact, take care of themselves very well, which does not

Fernando the waiter just danced for me.
He dances Flamenco.
I clapped. *Arriba! Arriba!*
What fun we had, but then old Maillot
came over and stopped him.
I sat there clapping for several seconds
alone at my table. The momentum carried me on in a trance
out of time
and in time, out of life
and in it.

(LIGHTS TO DAYLIGHT. HE TAKES OFF HIS JACKET.)

I've been reduced
to living in a shack in Alphonse's garden.
Well, I might be in the gutter,
or worse still a room at Madame F.'s.
Alphonse's wife feeds me a couple of times
a week and I'm allowed to pick
the flowers. I try to make a home of it.
I brought some shells from the lake—
white fans with pink linings;
I put them on the windowsill—
like white sailboats
they rock in the breeze.

Anachronistic? How about "brats"?

The Chautier kids scream a lot.
They peek round the door
and stare at me.
If I look up, they run off giggling.
I found an old vampire mask.
Next time they do it,
I'll put it on
and make sucking noises through my teeth.
That'll cure them.

I'm afraid of children.
They are afraid of me.
They think me a child grown old,
a bearded eight-year-old.
No one wants to feel they might
get old unnaturally,
get to be a man before
they have the size or years.
Sometimes the local gang
of five-year-olds rushes me
in the alley.

Alan: Exactly! Ability is a socially-approved fetish, with those having less of it tending to fetishize it in those who have more of it. So, when we look at the Nondisabled who fetishize the Disabled, we find it's counter to, or the converse of, a dynamic that is a given fact in our society.

Keep in mind also that for every fetish there's a corresponding complementary fetish, or co-fetish. For every Bottom there's a Top. The Waif Kid needs somebody to come along and pull his life together, so the Dad steps in to take charge. But just as the Kid (who may be chronologically no kid) needs the Dad, the Dad figure needs the Kid.
I find this aspect a positive one, for reasons which I will go on to discuss.

In this discussion, we're interested in how physical disability, whether visible or not, becomes an emotional icon, or symbol for the fetishist. I think it's primarily because it's a way to care for someone, a way to approach someone vulnerable. Which is also saying it's a way to see someone as approachable. Just as gay men are attracted to the "masculine," partly because it's seen as powerful and even, in fantasy, invulnerable, all of which is easily fetishized, all that invulnerability and power is not always approachable, and so we find the emotional counter-fetish that involves someone we can care for, the man who needs our help.

The person in need can be the Cute Young Kid, with obvious needs, or the Big Hunky Guy who needs a good Husband/Wife behind him to keep the shirts ironed and the checkbook balanced. For essentially those same reasons, I think, some nondisabled men are prompted to love someone disabled, because that person is perceived as someone to be cared for. So in these ways I do not see the disability fetish as intrinsically strange, because it is constituted similarly to the others. But it must be comparatively rare numerically, which would explain why I never ran into it in twenty years of professional or social life.

They pretend they're going to
knock me down, so they run at me
like a tribe of warring Hottentots
and stop at the last minute,
panting and sweating,
their faces a foot from mine.
Once they did knock me down
and they stood over me and screamed:
"Hunchback! Hunchback!"

(MOMENT)

(HE TAKES POSTCARDS AND THROWS THEM ACROSS THE STAGE IN FRUSTRATION. PUTS HAND TO HEAD, THEN FOLDS HANDS IN PRAYER FOR A MOMENT.)

In the church
these high vaults and pillars would
dwarf a giant.
So I, a dwarf,
or shall we say one of diminutive stature,
since I am not strictly speaking a dwarf,
I, a very small person,
am on a par with anyone.
Knowing this, I feel taller than usual
and more confident.
But there is always something that reminds me.
I look at the pulpit.
I could never have been a priest—
my head would only just poke up over
the rim—ridiculous; to the congregation
I'd look like Tom Thumb in his top hat.
Also at the altar saying Mass—
to God my head would appear
like an absurd blaspheming moon
on the sacred horizon.
No wonder I gave up the Church.
I always wanted to be best at everything—
it was priest or nothing.
Now it's nothing.
I am a small bohemian with grandiose ideas—
big as my head, the realization slight
as my body.
Top heavy I've been called.
Like Humpty Dumpty] Does this need punctuation running into the next line?
as the English say I had a big fall:
Paris to Aix, would-be fame to everlasting obscurity.

growing out of a clinical perspective, one that says it's unhealthy by definition. We're stuck with a pejorative term, and I think its built-in negativity is a reflection of what the clinical word actually describes. It suggests that you fail to involve yourself with the real human being, that you're only involved with an external, superficial, visual thing. This is the heart of the clinical meaning of the word. And yet I suspect the tendency—which society defines as "unhealthy"—is programmed into us biologically as males. The content, however, varies: muscles this decade, mustaches the last.

Bob: So the tendency to fetishize is preprogrammed, you maintain, whereas content is more culturally and historically induced?

Alan: Yes. And this is where I want to bring in the second great component of a fetish—one that I think is very important to talk about with respect to disabled men—and that's the emotional component, the emotional fetish, if you will. People have a very strong image—and I use that word to bring in the visual connotation, they have an image emotionally—of what is going to be fulfilling for them, even solve their problems. That emotional sense is even more fetishized, I think, than the visual. Sometimes it's feeling that I need a Big Strong Cop; it can be needing the Wonderful Husband, if you're into the domestic scene; or the Perfect Lover, if you're a Romantic. Another version is the Daddy, or alternately, the Son. And I think yet another version involves the Abled and the Disabled. Often the fetish is something we ourselves don't have, whether it's big muscles or a certain kind of "masculine" look. The do-have/don't-have contrast can be translated into connotations of "top" and "bottom." And, just as we can treat muscles as a fetish, we can treat ability the same way: the Sports Hero, for instance, is a society-wide fetish. Think of how his sweaty shirt is prized—is, in fact, fetishized.

Bob: The sweaty shirt that some guys would love to imagine masturbating over.

Do we make our own messes?
I should have spoken up more.
But failure always finds a way.
If it weren't for my size or my deformity
it would be because I was an orphan,
had a drunkard for a mother
or because I was just too nice.
Failure finds a way.
It leads you by the hand and says:
"Come this way—it's easier.
I am the comforter of the might-have-beens."

Brilliant, painful.

I finally admit it.
I haven't grown at all.
I can make myself fit any of the notches
in the door frame.
If I really relax,
I'm lower than the lowest one.

(POURS A DRINK.)

Old age bends me like a twig
in December wind,
curved like a charcoal line
on my canvas.

(DRINKS.)

If you look closely at the line of charcoal,
you'll see it's composed of tiny dots.
There's no firmness.
I'm infirm—
the wind can blow me from the canvas
any time.

(FINISHES DRINK.)

Dear Raoul—
this should be a letter to you but it isn't.
The days of absinthe, hot geraniums
and the placid Seine minding our business
went away with you in the carriage
to the other side of town.
I hear the clatter still.
All I did, all I did
was to touch your thigh—
my hand wandered too close.

Interview

HOW TO FIND LOVE WITH A FETISHIST

Bob Guter talks to psychotherapist Alan Sable about the difficult dynamic between men who desire disabled men and the objects of their desire.

Bob: I understand that your perspective is not that of someone who "owns" the disability fetish, but the viewpoint of a professional and unbiased observer. Before we began running the tape, you put the discussion in context by observing that we're a fetishistic society across the board, whether we're gazing at sculpted pecs as a sexual fetish or drinking a ridiculously expensive bottle of Italian mineral water as a kind of socioeconomic fetish. Can you talk a little about some of the sexual fetishes we may be more familiar with, to give us a point of reference from which to start our search?

Alan: I think there are two great components to a fetish. The first is the predominantly visual, which comes across in the various "looks" we are familiar with in the gay world. In my time as a gay man it started with the Clone Look—that was a prime fetish—and the associated Leather Look. Those were definite looks, or fetishes, if you will. They are still around, but the Look of the Moment happens to be the Muscle Look. Clustered around the dominant Look of the Moment are the many variations that appear and reappear, like the Young Waif, the Grungy Guy, the Attractive-Younger-Guy-Who . . .

Bob: As you describe these variations I'm beginning to wonder: what is a fetish and what is merely a look?

Alan: Exactly. Can an ordinary look be a fetish? I have been using the word fetish with gay abandon to make a point, which is that the word itself has a connotation—itself highly fetishized—which I, and I suspect many of us, have trouble with. It's a judgmental word

You pushed me away.
You pushed me away.
You pushed me away.
You said, "I can't be your lover."
"Raoul," I said, "I never asked you to be."

(DRINKS, CONTEMPLATING EMPTY GLASS.)

Drink is a drug no scientist
has properly investigated.
Its subtleties go unrecorded;

(POURS)

with me
two pernods and a vodka
produce malaise,
five whiskeys acrimony,
two litres of wine
lechery and nostalgia

(TOASTS, DRINKS. HE IS GETTING DRUNK.)

I read somewhere that
drink is an escape
from panic and loss;
I admit to escaping.
I'm one of those merry artists
numbing their panic,
who staggers home to ugly shack
or dim attic, to lover,
to wife and children
who say in their sleep:
"I wish he were a lawyer,
a carpenter, anything—"

(HE NODS OFF)

(LIGHTS DOWN TO LATE NIGHT. HE WAKES WITH A START. HE IS GROGGY.)

It's a minute past three
in the morning. The candle's
burning low like a ballerina
sinking to the floor in a
death dance; the only sounds—
the clock ticking, a distant dog barking.
It's so peaceful now that Marie and the children

actually running the show because the other was trying to please. Neither of us ever learned whether we liked the telling or the being told better.

Sabrina would require me to wear something to work to act as a constant reminder—maybe a fetish to wear under clothing or a tie that had strong associations. Maybe an extra pair of shorts, or no shorts, to be silly. I would write limericks for her to wear in her panties, not to be read until work's end, or put a boiled egg in her pocket, a tangerine in her purse. For someone who has lost the explosive release of orgasm, a key concept is to prolong more sustainable levels of excitement. Don't think kettle drum, think slow brushes on the snares.

I tell you, it works. For the first time in my life, there was horniness all the live-long day and the promise of some fun at the end of it.

And what a high order of fun. Not everyone is turned on by oral sex, but if you are, you're automatically twice as interesting a partner as someone who isn't. That's for nondisabled people. For crips, it's orders of magnitude. It's the vehicle for both you and your mate to go as far as you want for as long as you want with no old-fashioned limitations like premature ejaculation.

Add on the power trip, whatever you invent. Keep in mind that it's just reciprocal and consensual stuff between two adults who want to stay in each others' minds and pants all day long. Try it and then tell me it's sick.

It gets worse. See, Sabrina and I were having dessert one night—I think she had told me to dress up as a near-naked man with a baked potato in my jockeys, not too hot, no sour cream—when Old Nick whispered softly in my ear and said, "Take some of that warm chocolate syrup you're wasting on the vanilla ice cream and put it between those other lips."

I was entirely shocked by the idea, but that's what I did and that's when I learned that I love kinky sex. And had dessert.

have gone.
I can do exactly as I please;
I can drink.

(HE DRINKS)

I can swear.
I can be untidy.
I can stay up till all hours.
I can even scream if I want to.
And best of all, I can paint
as much as I damn well please
without interruption.
If only Paul would answer my letters...

(SING-SONG)

"There's no fool like an old fool."

(TAKES DRINK AND NEARLY DROPS THE GLASS RETURNING IT TO THE TABLE.)

I'm still alert, Raoul,
I'm not gone yet.
Only today I passed a peony,
broken off and lying in the gutter.
I came home and drew it perfectly from memory.
In my drawing, it lies on the steps of
the Art School—
red petals, scattered, bruised and torn.

(HE JUST BARELY MANAGES DRINK.)

Moonlight is shining in the graveyard
of my canvasses.
On some my name is worn away,
on others a face is half gone.

(HE SLIDES HIMSELF OFF THE CHAIR, ONTO THE FOOTSTOOL)

I wander past these tombstones,
dusting off some, dabbing others
with imaginary splashes of red paint—
red peonies, arrows dipped in blood,
my true lovers, my real children—
I apologize to you:
I could never afford the best paints, the right linen...

anyone for anything, sex included, yet here I was, begging, whimpering, pleading with this man to bring me to orgasm. Through his actions, he staunchly refused. And I was loving it.

He stood up, and stared me up and down. He reached out both hands. I grabbed them, and he pulled me to a standing position, wrapping both arms around me, clutching me to his chest. I wobbled on legs that weren't yet fit to stand on.

"Can you stand up?" he whispered. "Ugghh..." I gurgled. "Good, then get down there like a good boy and help Daddy out of these clothes", he said, gently lowering me to the floor.

I untied his shoes and took off his socks. Looking up, I saw him looking down at me, beaming. I rose to my knees, and reached my hands up toward his belt. "That's it ..." he cooed, running his hands through my hair, and resting them on my shoulders. I unbuckled his belt and unbuttoned his trousers. Stepping out of the pants, he stood there above me in plaid flannel boxers. I hesitated for a moment, then I pulled the shorts down, exposing his half-hard penis.

Nine inches indeed. It was huge, frighteningly so. I reached to grab it, and he grabbed me by the wrist. "No," he said. "Do you want to suck Daddy's cock?" I nodded, slightly. "Do you want to suck Daddy's cock?" he repeated. Again, I nodded, with a little more conviction this time. "Do? You? Want? To? Suck? Daddy's? Cock?" he asked, enunciating each word slowly and distinctly. "Yes, Daddy," I whispered, feeling very small and timid.

He grabbed his dick, held it right in front of my face, and slapped it against my cheek. Something I did must have told him I liked that, because he did it several more times, each time a little harder than the last. I could feel him getting harder with every slap. I opened my mouth to say something, and he stuffed his dick into my mouth. I gagged as the head of his cock hit the back of my throat. He grabbed me by the hair, and forced me to swallow more. "Relax," he said. "Daddy's a big boy. I'll teach you how to take it all. Just relax, breathe, and trust your Daddy."

(PICKS UP SKETCHBOOK.)

Here's a drawing—
who is it? Ah yes, Raoul, so smug,
the survivor. Whatever happened to
my sketches of Paul? Here's a backview
of Marie shunning me as always
like the moon itself—I always preferred
the sun, Paul's great smile on a hot
July day, his hand on my back and he'd say
"Come my remarkable fellow,
my inspiration, let's paint!"

Who's that at the door?
It's Paul.
He's so distinguished looking
with his gray beard.
He fills the doorframe.

(HE SLIDES HIMSELF ONTO THE FLOOR.)

Hey, Paul, cher ami!
"Don't move," he says, "I have something for you."
He pulls a wooden box out from
under a silk scarf.
"Lo," he says, "Magic!"
It's a box of paints.
I'm struck dumb.
Paul says, "You'd better use them or I'll
take them home
and use them myself."
"I will," I say.
Somehow I can't look him in the eyes
when I say it and I feel ashamed.
It's not because I won't use them.
I will.
But I keep thinking, why can't I
look him in the eyes?
I will use them.

(HE CLIMBS BACK UP ONTO THE FOOTSTOOL.)

"Dear Achille, since I'm the only person
I know now and have any regard for,
Dear Achille what do you make of all this?
You eat once or twice a week.
You pick up food from the garbage

I first came across co-editor Bob Guter's work in "Able-Together", a quarterly 'zine for men with disabilities. I became more of a fan through his "BENT: A Journal of Cripgay Voices" www.bentvoices.org), a powerful and empowering Webzine for disabled queer men. Together we joined forces to compile this collection of writings. The list of contributors grew organically through our contacts and as one writer suggested another. E-mail buddies further spread the word as our literary community developed.

In this anthology, you will read first person accounts by men with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, post-polio syndrome, spinal cord injury, deafness, blindness, spina bifida, osteogenesis imperfecta, AIDS, amputation, congenital damage, and traumatic injury and disfigurement, as well as unnamed mobility and neuromuscular disorders. Together we present "Queer Crips: Disabled Gay Men and Their Stories."

John R. Killacky

[Bob Guter's introduction section will follow.]

and off other people's plates
at the cafe.
Maillot's son threw you out yesterday
for trying to steal a bottle of rum.
Your heart beats irregularly—
ta-ta-tarrumph-ta,
ta-ta-tarrumph-ta-ta.
It's always raining.
It's cold.
I give you a month.
You have rheumatic hands,
gnarled like old tree roots;
the tree is almost dead,
but the roots cling on.
You're in search of another body—
this one's done.
You did make a gesture—
there are your drawings and paintings
for what they're worth.
Then there's Paul's portrait of you.
Someone may look at it and say:
He was quite a character.
I'll imagine myself to be him,
and make his story mine.'
And if this person is large or small,
whole or crippled,
if he is your double
or your opposite
man or woman,
if he or she can imagine you
in his house in Canton,
the Ukraine,
or on the moon,
they will celebrate your gesture,
your persistence,
which is all you had."

I don't feel as if I'd been
here before, so maybe after I die
I'll pass myself on
like a piece of furniture
left unsold at an auction
and given away.
But what about
passing on one's body only?
I'll call it re-incorporation.

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GLE 67
Hewitt

The Blaspheming Moon : a play in one act, 2004

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